

## **Quarterly Consortia Conference Call Summary**

### **Neighborhood Networks Quarterly Conference Call “Topics in Consortia Marketing and Partnership Development” September 13, 2005**

#### **Conference Call Summary**

On September 13, 2005, Neighborhood Networks held its fourth quarterly consortia conference call entitled, “Topics in Consortia Marketing and Partnership Development.” The call featured four guest speakers: Heather Bradley-Geary of the newly-formed Heartland TEC, a Neighborhood Networks consortium based in the greater Kansas City area; Donald Freeman, HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator for Los Angeles; Walter Gillespie of the newly-revived Illinois Neighborhood Networks Consortium, and board member of the newly-formed Neighborhood Networks National Consortium; and Joe Jurczyk, executive director of Grassroots.org, a 2005 Neighborhood Networks national partner. The guest speakers were chosen because of their experience in marketing and partnership development for Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia.

The call also featured several Neighborhood Networks staff: Kenya Crumel, Neighborhood Networks Director of Consortia Development; Shawn Escoffery, Neighborhood Networks Project Director for Consortia and National Partnership Development; Tara McCall, a member of the Neighborhood Networks Consortia Development Team; and Tanya Poteat, Neighborhood Networks Director of National Partnership Development.

This call focused on best practices and strategies that Neighborhood Networks consortia sites applied as they grew through leveraging relationships and long-term partnerships. This call was designed to help Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia understand:

- Effective strategies for marketing a Neighborhood Networks consortium and a center’s affiliation with the consortium.
- The key steps to securing and maintaining local and national partners.
- How to leverage current relationships as a means to increasing access to other resources.

#### ***Highlights from the Call:***

##### **Introduction to Partnership Development**

The speakers began the call by discussing what it means to have a partnership. They explained that as many Neighborhood Networks consortia work to better sustain their centers, partnership development emerges as a key part of building strong, effective, and

efficient technology centers. Enhanced partnership development is an incentive for Neighborhood Networks centers that choose to either form or join a Neighborhood Networks consortium. Corporations and other organizations are often more likely to partner with a group of centers because of their combined ability to affect a greater population of residents through coordinated efforts.

### **Types of Partnerships**

The speakers described the four major types of partnerships that are available to Neighborhood Networks consortia, including:

- **Networking:** Two organizations exchanging information for the betterment of both.
- **Coordinating:** Two or more organizations working together to make sure that their activities do not overlap.
- **Cooperating:** Two or more organizations sharing resources in order to achieve a common goal.
- **Collaborative:** Two organizations working together to the extent that they share “risks, responsibilities, and rewards.”

It was noted that Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia should be clear about what type of partnership best suits their particular needs. Organizations also need to think “outside of the box” and not be afraid to partner with organizations that they may have thought would be hard to engage.

### **Pursuing and Securing Partnerships**

Next, the speakers introduced asset mapping as one of the first steps many organizations take in building partnerships. Asset mapping is a process in which organizations “brainstorm” on the resources within their community. The speakers recommended that while constructing an asset map, Neighborhood Networks consortia think about the following questions:

- What are the goals of your Neighborhood Networks consortium?
- What goals are you achieving, and on which goals do you need to improve performance?

When brainstorming about resources, consortia should remember to consider all types of community members. Walter Gillespie and Heather Bradley-Geary explained that they researched individuals, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, local media, social clubs, colleges and universities, and corporations in their respective communities when brainstorming about potential partners for their centers. Once Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia become aware of the resources around them, as well as their

successes and areas needing improvement, they are better equipped to identify areas within the organization that could benefit from partnership building.

### **Marketing to Potential Partners**

Marketing is an important component of partnership development for Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia. Bradley-Geary and Gillespie gave examples of the strategies they have used to develop relationships and lay the groundwork for future partnerships. They emphasized that Neighborhood Networks consortia must inform potential partners about who they are and what they do. Consortia leaders can begin to do this by sharing their mission and vision statements for their organizations, as well as their major goals and the role partners can play in carrying out activities to help accomplish these goals. When consortia leaders know exactly why their organizations exist, who they serve, and how they accomplish their goals, they can more effectively market their organizations to potential partners, and determine which partnerships are aligned with their needs.

### **Mutual Benefits of Partnerships**

The guest speakers then advised consortia members to explain to potential partners that Neighborhood Networks presents a valuable opportunity for any partner wishing to make a strategic investment in a single community or in communities nationwide.

Through partnerships with Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia, partners:

- Gain the opportunity to train a labor force with skills to meet their needs.
- Open a new avenue for involvement in a community, and a potential link to new markets.
- Make a real difference in the economic health and wealth of a community and its people.
- Gain the value of marketing and exposure to a network of technology centers across the country.

### **Local Partnerships**

The speakers then discussed strategies for developing local partnerships. They acknowledged that many listeners may have already identified potential local partners by determining the resources in their communities. Gillespie noted that organizations often look at the obvious potential partners, including corporations, schools, foundations, and libraries. He urged consortia leaders to consider less obvious potential partners like the police department, religious groups, parks and recreation centers. Partnerships can be as creative as possible as long as they fit a common need within the collaborating organizations. The speakers asked consortia leaders to also keep in mind that many

consortia partnerships come about as a result of one site working with a partner and extending that partnership to the other members of the consortium.

### **Neighborhood Networks National Partnerships**

The Neighborhood Networks Consortia Development Team then explained that the Neighborhood Networks Initiative seeks to build partnerships with national organizations on an annual basis. Many of these partnerships pave the way for collaborations between local centers and the national partner's local affiliate. Joe Jurczyk described the process of developing the Neighborhood Networks national partnership with Grassroots.org, and talked about the Web hosting and legal services his organization has made available to consortia and individual Neighborhood Networks centers. The other speakers then explained that national partners can provide any number of resources, including goods, such as furnishings or computer hardware and software; technology services, such as teaching LAN set-up. They can also provide guidance in starting a small business and financial support. For more information about current Neighborhood Networks national partners, conference call participants were instructed to visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org).

### **Managing Partnerships**

After discussing strategies for developing partnerships, the speakers cautioned that Neighborhood Networks consortia should safeguard against problems down the road once they decide to move forward with partnerships. First, they advised that consortia articulate the benefits of the partnership as well as each organization's roles and responsibilities within the boundaries of a written agreement. Most consortia use a Memorandum of Understanding, also known as an MOU. An MOU can help prevent confusion and frustration in the long run.

Centers also need to ensure that they have adequate staffing, funding, and time to make the partnership work. The speakers indicated that in the early stages of a partnership, it might take time to get all parties on the same page while developing a plan of action. Donald Freeman described the Neighborhood Networks national partnership with NASA and explained that it has been successful in part because of the clear and detailed plan that was developed by NASA in cooperation with the participating pilot centers. He stressed that organizations should agree early on how decisions will be made, who is the lead representative of the partnership, and who will make key decisions, if needed.

Freeman expressed that communication and monitoring the partnership are very important aspects of running a smooth collaboration. As in the case of the NASA partnership, all partners involved should make decisions about how often the key players will meet, how long those meetings will last, where meetings will occur, and what organization will lead the meeting. Also, in communicating internally and externally about the partnership, partnering organizations should develop best practices to facilitate effective communication.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the call, the speakers provided clear evidence that partnership development is an essential component of the process of developing, sustaining, and growing Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers. The speakers noted that partnerships can take on a variety of forms and can provide a variety of products and services to consortia and centers. Each speaker stressed to the participants the importance of knowing their organizations and its goals so they can pursue partnerships that will help achieve the organization's objectives while meeting its most pressing needs. The speakers also stressed how crucial it is to spend adequate time researching the resources that are available to Neighborhood Networks consortia, both locally and nationally.

Once community resources have been identified, marketing and relationship building are the next steps toward developing strong partnerships for consortia. By discussing their own experiences in partnership development, the speakers demonstrated that partnerships are most successful when there is a mutual benefit for both parties. Therefore, consortia should be prepared to sell potential partners on how their organizations can benefit from working with Neighborhood Networks centers. Partnerships that are developed on the basis of relationship building, communication, and mutual benefits are invaluable and can help Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers fulfill their missions and achieve sustainability.